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Four counties move to drought alert status

HELENA, Mont. – Lieutenant Governor Mike Cooney today said four Montana counties – Glacier, Teton, Pondera and the northern portion of Lewis and Clark – have reached “Drought Alert” status, as defined by the Montana Drought Response Plan and state statute.

In a letter to county commissioners, Cooney noted the determination was based on water supply and soil moisture data from the Natural Resources and Conservation Service, the National Agricultural Statistics Service, and other state and federal agencies, along with the Palmer Drought Severity Index and Surface Water Supply Index.

Cooney, who chairs the Governor’s Drought and Water Supply Advisory Committee, said the region has experienced two consecutive years of low snowpack, early runoff and minimal subsoil moisture. June precipitation in the four-county area was in the range of 25 to 50 percent of normal.

The “Drought Alert” designation does not carry any official status with respect to state or federal disaster assistance programs. Rather, “it is intended to give high visibility to the continuing impacts of drought in your county and the likelihood that conditions will further deteriorate in the absence of precipitation if the heat, sun and wind of summer continue in the coming weeks,” Cooney wrote.

At the upcoming meeting of the Governor’s Drought and Water Supply Advisory Committee on July 14, committee members will assess the latest water supply, soil

and climate conditions across the state. More counties could be added to “Drought Alert” status at that time, and some areas could be declared in Severe Drought.

For more information on current drought and water supply conditions, visit drought.mt.gov.

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